

Testimony to Housing Committee, Feb. 5, 2015, New Haven CT by Carla Weil, Executive Director, Greater New Haven Community Loan Fund

Chairman Butler, Chairman Holder-Winfield, Sen. Hwang, Rep. Kupchick, Honorable Committee Members, thank you for this opportunity to talk about the 8-30g statute.

I am Carla Weil, Executive Director of the Greater New Haven Community Loan Fund. I have been working for over 26 years to help create housing that is affordable to individuals and families across our state. It has been my experience that the 8-30 g statue has been an extremely important tool for making sure that these families have housing options. Therefore, I am here this evening to speak in opposition of HB5055, 5306, 5577, 5579, 5581 and the many other bills related to the 8-30g statute that would repeal or seriously weaken it.

Housing opportunity means that families in Connecticut should be able to find affordable places to live that allow them convenient access to jobs, school and transportation and preferably also proximity to culture, religious anchors, friends and family members. Choice means that these options need to be available throughout the state, in urban, suburban and rural locations.

Unfortunately, Connecticut continues to be ranked high in things where we don't want to be near the top, like rental prices, where we are 6th in the nation, and home prices where we rank 8th and 3rd in our loss of 25-34 year olds in the workforce. Similarly we have low rankings in areas where we'd like to excel, like construction of multi-family housing where we're 50th in units built per capita over the decade from 2002-2011 – a fact that is closely related to our high rental costs.

What that means on the ground is when our children grow up they can't afford to live in our towns. Our town professionals and service providers – police, firefighters, health workers, teachers, don't have affordable housing options where they work -- that is, housing where they can find a school, a neighborhood and community services that will allow their children to flourish. We all want the same for our children. But working class families in CT are given fewer choices because too many of our communities use their zoning decisions to exclude them.

In the 24 years it has been law, 8-30g has helped provide workforce housing opportunities that would otherwise not have been created. That includes affordable rental units that allow seniors to downsize but stay in the town where they've lived for decades, to affordable condo units that have been a young couple's first step into homeownership. The Loan Fund financed such a project about 15 years ago, creating 21 attractive, well-built condominium units in North Haven that have been an affordable first step for many working families since that time, and a stable long term affordable residence for those who bought and stayed. There are many similar success stories throughout the State.

Dire predictions about the detrimental effects of 8-30g developments, like increases in crime, taxes and traffic, have not come to pass and, in fact towns come to see the social and fiscal benefits of adding these quality housing units. Studies, like one completed last year by Prof. Douglas Massey of Princeton and another by Heather Schwartz of the Rand Corp. , have

documented the positive effects on academic achievement and workplace success when families are able to relocate to homes in high-resource communities and children can attend those schools.

As we enter this legislative session we have an economy that is finally recovering from the great recession and housing development in Connecticut that is finally hitting its stride – thanks in good part to the Governor's commitment to housing and his understanding of its close connection to economic development. If you weaken 8-30g and allow communities with good schools and abundant resources to use their zoning power to exclude affordable units, you will stymie that housing development momentum and shut the door on working families' ability to have choices about where they decide to call home. That is not the way for Connecticut to be the vital thriving State we all want it to be.